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Daily Press Briefing
Tom Casey, Deputy Spokesman
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1:15 p.m. EST

MR. CASEY: Okay. First of all, thanks again, Tom. I appreciate you taking the time to join us at the start of the briefing. With that, we'll go to whatever else you have on your agenda.

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George.

QUESTION: Reaction to the IAEA report?

MR. CASEY: Well, as you know, the report has now been issued and circulated. While I think everyone needs to take a good chance to look at it and review it carefully, what does come through in it are the basic conclusions that I think we'd all pretty much foreseen going into this, which is first that Iran has not complied with the requirements of the UN Security Council and has not stopped enriching uranium, Iran has not ceased any of its other uranium enrichment activities and it also has not answered the outstanding questions that the IAE -- IAEA, excuse me, has had for some time about the origins of their program, including a series of issues such as where various kinds of uranium contamination, HEU as well as LEU had come from.

So the report, I think, gives us a pretty clear picture that shows that Iran has not changed its behavior, has not changed its views and is continuing on the path of defiance. And as I told you this morning, that's unfortunate. We think that it would be far better for the Iranian people as well as for the international community to be able to have Iran engage with the permanent members of the Security Council and Germany in negotiations. But of course, to do that, it requires them to heed the requirements of the resolution and suspend the uranium enrichment activities.

So the next steps are to look at in the Security Council what we might need to do in response to this. And I know there are consultations that are underway. The Secretary had some meetings relevant to this this morning before she left Berlin and she's spoken to that already. There are ongoing consultations in New York. As I mentioned, Nick Burns has been very active in terms of discussing this issue with his colleagues. And I think you'll see over the coming days an outline starting to appear of how we'd like to respond to this.

My understanding in terms of the specific actions in the Security Council is we are awaiting a formal meeting to be called by the presidency. I have an understanding that that will likely take place next week, and that will be the first of the Council's formal opportunities to review the report and take a look at things. But again, we'll be continuing to consult outside of that formal meeting structure with our partners and allies as we move along here.

Well, that was easy. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: No, is it still --

MR. CASEY: Sorry, go ahead.

QUESTION: The Secretary said last week that although no decision had been made, it was likely that you would seek a second resolution. You've seen nothing whatsoever that dissuades you from that view? I mean, if anything, it's probably more likely that you'll --

MR. CASEY: No, I think clearly while we again need to look at all the details of the report, it's very clear that none of the requirements of the resolution have been met. The resolution then says that the Council is going to meet and look at and consider other action -- other actions in response to Iran's noncompliance. So we'll certainly be doing that. And while I don't want to prejudge anything, as the Secretary has said, we're -- you know, considering and looking at a second resolution. Certainly though, there are going to be additional actions taken by the international community in response to Iran's noncompliance.

And again, the goal here is to convince Iran to change its behavior and to do what its been so long asked of it, which is to suspend its uranium enrichment activities and come back to the talks. And again, as I said this morning, I think that this is a real missed opportunity, another missed opportunity on the part of the Government of Iran, to not only engage with the international community but to really do the right thing by its people.

The United States and the broad international community does not object to civilian nuclear power for Iran or for any other country that operates in good standing with its international obligations. And certainly whether you look at the proposals that have been put on the table over the course of the last couple of years by the Russians among others to try and address this situation, time and again, unfortunately, what's happened is

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the Iranian Government has spurned all those opportunities to resolve this issue in a way that would allow them to achieve their stated objective but would assure the international community that they're not actually using those programs to cover the development of a nuclear weapon.

So I think it's a fair question for anyone that holds that this is simply just a normal, regular old civilian nuclear program why it is that the Iranians seems so intent -- the Iranian Government seems so intent on refusing all these opportunities to have them achieve that objective but still resolve the many questions that are outstanding and provide assurances that the international community clearly and repeatedly has said it needs.

QUESTION: Tom?

MR. CASEY: Yeah.

QUESTION: I've got to say, I feel like I'm coming in, where I left off two years ago in this story. But you talked about the outside consultations. Are you aware of any -- of what those are right now? Are they going on here? Are they going on in New York right now or --

MR. CASEY: Well, there are consultations going on in several formats. The Secretary mentioned this morning in her comments that she had met and discussed the Iranian issue with several of her colleagues there. Under Secretary Burns, as I mentioned, has also been engaged via the phone with some of his counterparts. And there are active discussions and formal discussions going on in New York with Ambassador Wolf and other members of our UN team.

QUESTION: Is the -- the context of those discussions is what to do in the Council or just talking about the report? Have you gotten to that stage what to do in the Council or are you just talking --

MR. CASEY: Well, the context right now is, you know, getting people's assessments of the report and then also talking about what others as well as we consider to be logical next steps and what we might do. Again, the Secretary signaled that we certainly are considering the possibility of another resolution, but that will obviously depend on the results of these consultations and where all of us feel we can best apply our influence and best take steps to encourage the Iranians to comply with their obligations.

Let's go back here.

QUESTION: Different topic?

MR. CASEY: Sure.

QUESTION: Sorry --

QUESTION: Come back.

MR. CASEY: One hold on that. Let's go back to Sylvie.

QUESTION: Do you have any sense of -- already I don't know if you had the possibility -- do you have any sense of the readiness of Russia to talk about another resolution since the Secretary met with Foreign Minister Lavrov?

MR. CASEY: I don't have a readout on her conversations specifically and I'd leave it to the party to address that. But we've very much been engaged with all members of the permanent five as well as Germany on this subject. Certainly, we believe that the Russians continue to understand the seriousness of the defiance of Iran for the international community, including for the Security Council resolutions that they helped craft and voted for. And certainly they are concerned about this and are engaged with us in these discussions about next steps.

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Yeah. Same subject, anybody? Nina?

QUESTION: Yeah. The report itself reports a very low level of uranium enrichment. I mean, certainly not weapons grade. What does this tell us, do you think, in reality the progress of the program?

MR. CASEY: Well, I don't think -- and I'll leave it to both the experts at the IAEA as well as technical experts in this government to give you an assessment of where that specifically leaves them. Certainly what is clear though is that they have not only not suspended their uranium enrichment activities as required, but they're continuing to try and push ahead with them. As to what technical obstacles they have or haven't encountered, I'll leave it to the people that really understand the ins and outs of the nuclear fuel cycle to give you an evaluation of that.

QUESTION: Can I follow up, please?

MR. CASEY: A follow-up? Sure.

QUESTION: A question about the language that ElBaradei tends to use in these reports. In previous reports he said that he -- his general line is he cannot verify the uranium nuclear program is exclusively peaceful. Is this language strong enough? I mean, should it be saying he can't verify that it's peaceful? Should it be saying that they really are up to no good?

MR. CASEY: Now look, this is a technical report and when you look at that -- and this is the language that the IAEA and their technical experts use in producing these kinds of documents -- I think it's very disturbing when you see international inspectors after several years of review and after several years of asking for information and asking for questions being able to fundamentally not make a clear statement as to what that nuclear program is for.

And the fact that they cannot rule out diversion of nuclear materials, that they cannot rule out programs outside of what's been formally declared, the fact that even among the things that are formally declared there are many, many unanswered questions, I think makes it pretty clear to most people that this program which had an almost two-decade clandestine history before it was ever brought to light is one that the international community definitely needs to be concerned about.

And you again have to ask yourself, with all the opportunities that are being provided and have been provided over the years for Iran to resolve these issues peacefully, reasonably and do so in a way that would still allow them to have a civilian nuclear program, what is the intention? And I think for us, it's very clear that the intention is not just to develop civilian nuclear power but to use this as a cover for a nuclear weapons program.

Yeah.

QUESTION: Tom, part of --

MR. CASEY: Okay. Same subject?

QUESTION: Same subject.

MR. CASEY: Okay. Go ahead, Joel, and then we'll move on down in front.

QUESTION: Tom, Secretary Hill in delivering a address at Brookings was commenting that the Iranian nuclear reactor work was totally separate from, of course, North Korea. Now it appears to be an infrastructure that is with a black market hidden -- it could very well be banking and suppliers. Are we going - or asking international community, meaning the talks in Europe that Condoleezza Rice has just had in Berlin, to go after those suppliers, not necessarily at government level but there's a criminal element that's supplying all this equipment and it just doesn't merely stop. You want it to stop quickly and it's just dragging on. You've dragged on in these talks for better than a year and half.

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MR. CASEY: Well, but Joel, I think what you're leaving out of the picture here are a number of things. First of all, for the part of the United States, it was a very active program, both established by law as well as through executive order, to prevent the transfer of nuclear technologies, other WMD technologies, ballistic missile technologies. There are international regimens as well that many countries have subscribed to doing that. There are efforts led by the United States, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative, designed to make sure that those, whether countries or commercial entities or other kinds of networks trying to traffic in these materials can be identified, interdicted and ultimately brought down.

There are also activities that are underway, whether it's with respect to Iran or North Korea or other countries who have come under Chapter 7 sanctions to make required, as a legally binding Chapter 7 requirement, that countries again take actions to prevent the transfer of technologies openly, clandestinely or otherwise to countries that are attempting to develop nuclear weapons or attempting to proliferate these technologies.

So there's a lot of work that is actually going on in this area. Certainly there's more that needs to be done because we all understand the implications of nuclear proliferation, whether that's in the hands of a negative state actor such as the Iranian Government or whether that's potentially in the hands of a terrorist group.

Let's go down here. Sure.

QUESTION: (Inaudible) talking to China for this specific matter. The talking will be in the level of Under Secretary Burns or Secretary Negroponte when he travel to China to the area will the --

MR. CASEY: Well, I think first of all, again, as you know, a lot of the conversations among the P-5+1 have been handled at the political directors level, which is Under Secretary Burns, and I fully expect he'll continue to be engaged in this. As we said when we announced Deputy Secretary Negroponte's trip to Asia a couple days ago, the -- one of the many issues that he expects to raise in the context of his discussions with all three countries is Iran, along with a variety of other issues. So I'm sure that this subject will come up in his discussions certainly with the Chinese as well as other countries.

You have to remember, too, Japan has recently taken some steps in terms of cracking down on potential proliferation issues related to Iran and in compliance with Security Council resolutions. So all countries have obligations to work on this issue. So I'm sure it'll come up in the context of his discussions. But I think in terms of working out some of the more specific details of a potential resolution and follow-on actions that activity will also, of course, involve Under Secretary Burns and our Ambassador, or our chargé really in New York Alex Wolf, and his counterparts there.

QUESTION: Thank you.

MR. CASEY: Let's go back here.

QUESTION: Different topic.

MR. CASEY: Sure.

QUESTION: Norway opened a conference to discuss a ban on cluster bombs. They have invited 48 nations to discuss the matter. Given the U.S. stance against the usage, why did the U.S. choose not to attend?

MR. CASEY: You know, I've seen some reporting on this. But I honestly don't have updated material on this for you, so we'll get you an answer on that and post something for you later.

QUESTION: A quick follow-up then.

MR. CASEY: Sure.

QUESTION: So what would the official U.S. stance be against such a ban?

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MR. CASEY: Well, I think you can talk to the Pentagon about the use of these munitions. I am not familiar to be honest with you with the specific developments of the legal documents people are considering out in Norway. In general, though, the United States always wishes to make sure that legitimate use of weapons under international laws is always allowed. But in terms of the specifics on this actual conference and event, we'll be happy to get you some information on it later.

Yeah, David.

QUESTION: Tom, a few days ago Albania had a set of elections that were considered important test of their aspirations to the Euro-Institutions. And I was wondering whether the United States had a view on the conduct of those elections?

MR. CASEY: Well, I think when you look at this -- first of all, we generally viewed the February 18 elections as peaceful and democratic. And we did note the report that was done by the OSCE's office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights. They did issue a preliminary report and that did identify some technical and procedural concerns, as well as some problems in the preparation and conduct of the elections. And we certainly agree with their assessment, with the OSCE's assessment, and encouragement to Albanian political forces to work together at this point to continue the process of electoral reforms and ultimately accomplish the goals that they've set out for themselves of completing this process so that future elections will meet the highest standards.

QUESTION: There seems to be some feeling in Albania that's there daylight between the U.S. and OSCE positions on elections with the U.S., maybe somewhat more lenient. Is there anything to that?

MR. CASEY: Well, again, as I said, we associate ourselves with the OSCE's report on this subject. As you know, not only in Albania, but in many countries in the sphere in which the OSCE operates, we take very seriously and often rely on the efforts of the OSCE to which we often contribute for analysis and review of different electoral processes, specifically what has the oftentimes interesting acronym of ODIHR, but the Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, which work on these issues have both internally amongst themselves as well as on the resources they draw from member states, a great deal of technical expertise and we have great respect for it. And again, in this case, we concur with their assessment of this election.

Yeah, Arshad.

QUESTION: Do you have any comment on the sentencing of an Egyptian blogger to four years in prison for allegedly having insulted Islam and President Mubarak?

MR. CASEY: Yeah, I did look into this. We are very concerned by the conviction and prison sentence of Mr. Abdel Karim for expressing his opinions. And as far as our record show, he's the first Egyptian blogger to be prosecuted for the contents of his remark. And certainly while we have great respect for all religions, including certainly Islam, the role of freedom of expression is critical for the development of a democratic and prosperous society. And so free expression of opinion and free speech are a critical component of that, including on the internet, and I think we view them as part of general basic human rights.

QUESTION: Have you conveyed that view to the Egyptian Government?

MR. CASEY: We have discussed this issue in general with the Egyptian Government. You'll note, too, that Mr. Karim is mentioned actually in our human rights report from this past year. So we have discussed issues involving him at this time. I understand we'll be discussing this specific action with them as well. I did not get confirmation that those conversations have yet taken place, though.

QUESTION: And can I follow up on George's question of this morning --

MR. CASEY: Sure.

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QUESTION: -- regarding the Egyptian man alleged to have been the subject of rendition and so on and his claims that he was tortured while in Egyptian custody, has been released and fears that he'll be arrested and tortured again. Are you concerned about that?

MR. CASEY: Well, first of all, other than the press reports, I don't have any information to verify or corroborate any of his statements about his treatment in Egyptian custody. I will say though -- and again, this relates back to the previous question we discussed as well -- human rights is an important part of our dialogue with the Egyptian Government throughout our relationship with them. It's a subject that the Secretary discusses, as well as other senior officials.

And if you look at our -- again, going back to our Human Rights Report, we do raise a number of concerns and questions about some judicial procedures as well as treatment of those in custody in Egypt. So this -- these kinds of issues are a regular part of our dialogue with the Egyptians.

QUESTION: Well, are you going to look further into this and perhaps tell us, you know, something about what you learned?

MR. CASEY: George, again, I think with respect to this individual and some of his claims, I really don't have anything new to offer you.

QUESTION: Well, no, I don't mean now. I mean next week when you've had a chance to look into it.

MR. CASEY: If we have anything more to offer you on it, I'll let you know.

QUESTION: Doesn't it raise questions on your rendition program, which is supposed to be (inaudible) -- assurances that the prisoners you send back to that country won't be tortured?

MR. CASEY: Well, again, I have nothing additional to tell you about this man's claims that have been made. We've made it clear repeatedly, and I'll just say it again for the record, that we don't transport and have not transported detainees from one country to another for the purpose of interrogation by torture. That is a policy that you've heard from us before. It applies in all cases.

QUESTION: So did you receive any assurances from Egypt that he wouldn't be tortured?

MR. CASEY: Again, I have nothing new to discuss on this individual's case beyond what you've heard from other people previously.

Joel.

QUESTION: Tom, over at the National Press Club, the World Sindhi Institute is holding a press conference today and they're worried and concerned about humanitarian matters stemming from Baluchistan Province, the area of Quetta, and there are some people under detention. And also, at the same time, the Pakistani Government -- this is mostly a humanitarian group -- are denying their representation at the UN. Do you have anything that you can say concerning that?

MR. CASEY: Sorry. Denying who representation at the UN?

QUESTION: These -- it's largely an advocacy humanitarian style group that's a worldwide organization for representation at the United Nations.

MR. CASEY: Joel, I'd refer you to the United Nations on that though, but individual countries, as I understand it, don't make determinations on which groups gain observer status at the UN. That's a process that is handled in the committee framework there. But I'm not aware of any specific activity that --

QUESTION: And they've been represented before.

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MR. CASEY: Yeah, again, I'd refer you back up to the UN. I just don't have anything on it.

Arshad.

QUESTION: If you have anything on this -- if you don't, if you could look into it, that would be great.

MR. CASEY: Okay, sure.

QUESTION: A man who represents three Cuban boxers says that they have been denied entry to the United States. They apparently applied for visas from Colombia and they were -- according to their representative, they were denied visas because they don't have a permanent residence. The reason they don't have a permanent residence is that they defected from Cuba, so it's kind of a catch-22.

Do you have anything on this? Is this true? Were these men denied visas? Are you reviewing the case?

MR. CASEY: You know, I think I had some stuff in here earlier but I can't seem to find it, Arshad. We'll get you --

QUESTION: If you could, that'd be great.

MR. CASEY: We'll get you an answer on that and have something for you.

QUESTION: Thank you.

(The briefing was concluded at 1:32 p.m.)

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